

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Brooke Williams, and I am a resident and worker in Hartford. I am writing because I firmly support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status.

Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our community – and that means **everybody** – is healthy. Health does not exist in a vacuum, the wellbeing of my neighbors is interconnected with my own, and yours too. This fact was made abundantly clear during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic – health disparities among black, brown, and immigrant communities drove some of the largest spikes in the nation. Our strength as a state is defined entirely by the health of our people, our workforces, our communities, our schools. Therefore, we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to **all immigrants of any age, not just those younger than 26**.

Despite having top-tier medical facilities right here in CT, it is incredibly difficult to access care. I have often had to skip routine exams, specialist visits, mental health treatment, diagnostic testing, etc. because of financial pressures or difficulties with insurance. This has led to complications and conditions getting worse. I am incredibly aware of how barriers, of any kind, to healthcare keep people sick, keep people from getting help until their condition reaches a critical emergency state.

I dedicated a lot of my studies to issues impacting the immigrant community in the U.S., particularly undocumented immigrants. So much literature confirms that immigrants (particularly undocumented, or immigrants in mixed-status households) will not seek out resources out of fears of deportation. This includes not asking for housing repairs, not asking for restraining orders for domestic violence victims, and relevant to this bill: tolerating pain and discomfort and sickness, not seeking out medical care until the point of absolute emergency. Morally, it's unquestionable: **to let our neighbors suffer and die while we have the resources to care for them is unjust, period.**

Not only is it unjust, it's also inefficient, costly, and burdening the larger healthcare system of the state. Our emergency and crisis response systems are already stretched incredibly thin, and procedures to address urgent health crises are often way more expensive than regular preventative care. **Why are we choosing to create more health emergencies by stopping people from obtaining regular, preventative care?**

Honestly, though, beyond any of that: **passing HB 6616 means that my friend, who came to this country to flee from gang violence, can stay healthy and live longer to raise his baby girl.** I lost my own father to undertreated health complications really early in my life. I'm determined to fight to ensure that all parents, including undocumented parents who fled dangerous circumstances to give their children a better life, can remain in their families' lives for longer. The strength of our state is entirely dependent on the health of our families.

I humbly ask the committee to expand access to HUSKY to all, regardless of nationality or age.

*Thank you for your time and consideration,*

*Brooke Williams*

*Hartford Neighbor, Trinity College Public Policy Presidential Fellow '19*